Met Office

October 2003

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1961-1990.

UK overview

A rather cold month across all parts of the UK, and the first month since October 2002 to be colder than average. Very sunny, with most parts also seeing another month of below average rainfall.

Saunton Sands (Devon) reported a temperature of 22.1 °C on the 2nd. Sleet and snow fell widely on Dartmoor on the 22nd with a covering above 1,000 feet.

England and Wales diary of highlights

Very sunny but rather cold overall. Changeable first half, then dry and sunny followed by a cold spell with thundery rain and some snow and overnight frost. A very wet end to the month.

1st to 2nd

A depression over Biscay gave warm and changeable weather in the south, where some thundery rain broke out. Saunton Sands (Devon) reached 22.1 °C on the 2nd.

3rd to 10th

The changeable theme continued as low-pressure systems tracked east-south-east from the Iceland area. It felt cool in the west or north-west winds, which became strong at times. There were outbreaks of rain and showers from time to time, in particular the north-west experienced regular soakings during the 4th, 5th and 6th, with sunny spells between the showers. Some thundery outbreaks affected south-east districts during the 4th and 5th.

11th to 19th

A mainly sunny dry period as high pressure exerted its influence. An anticyclone over Scandinavia migrated to Denmark by the 16th, then to the Greenland/Iceland area by the 18th. Low pressure near Biscay drifted east bringing occasional rain or showers to the south-west from the 11th to 15th. Overnight mist and fog patches formed in places, and later it became chilly as easterly winds picked up. Temperatures dropped markedly everywhere by the end of the 19th as north-east winds transported air in from arctic regions.

20th to 25th

Mostly unsettled and cold with outbreaks of thundery rain or showers in many places. A depression off southern Norway moved to Biscay by 22/23rd bringing freshening easterly winds. Snow lay early on the 20th over high parts of the north Pennines. Thundery rain fell over North Yorkshire and east coast counties during the 20th and 21st and later in east Kent overnight on the 20th/21st. Margate received 38 mm on the 21st. Southern areas bore the brunt of thundery showers on the 22nd, sleet and snow fell widely, with Dartmoor having a covering above 300 m. There was widespread frost on most nights, -6.9 °C being registered at Shap (Cumbria) on the 22nd. Locally heavy wintry showers in the north-east spread to the Midlands later on 23rd. A fresh band of thundery showers spread across much of the region from the north during the 25th.

26th to 27th

Mainly dry and sunny, with overnight frost and some fog patches under transient high pressure.

28th to 31st

Very unsettled and wet. After a frosty start on the 28th with some patchy mist and fog, bands of heavy rain

and showers crossed the region. During the 30th a deep north Atlantic depression heading for Biscay brought very heavy rain to many places. The 31st saw outbreaks of rain, thundery near the south coast gradually die out. An unusual display of the northern lights/aurora was seen at night where clouds cleared.

Scotland diary of highlights

Dry, sunny and cold.

October continued the long succession of months with anticyclonic spells and below-average rainfall. However, October 2003 was also the first month with below average temperature since October 2002. Sunshine was well above average.

For the first ten days a large anticyclone near the Azores steered a series of depressions from Iceland towards Scandinavia. A succession of fronts crossed Scotland, separated by periods of north-westerly winds and ridges of high pressure. The 1st and 7th were mainly fair days in the ridges, with periods of frontal rain on the 5th and overnight on 2nd, 7th and 8th. It was quite stormy on the 6th and 10th, with gusts of 78 mph at Barra on the 6th and 74 mph at Lerwick on the 10th. The highest temperature of the month, 19 °C, was reached at Leuchars on the 9th.

High pressure transferred towards Scandinavia between the 11th and 13th. A fair day on the 11th was followed by cloudy weather with warm nights on the next two days as southerly winds set in.

From the 14th to the 18th the anticyclone remained near southern Norway with light south-easterly winds across Scotland. The weather became fine and sunny, although there was low cloud in the east at times. Nights became progressively colder and on the 17th the temperature at Aboyne ranged between -5 °C and 16 °C. In contrast, the temperature at the summit of Cairngorm never fell below 7 °C.

A wintry spell of weather was ushered in on the 19th as the anticyclone moved towards Iceland and cold north-easterly winds advanced across Scotland. The weather was fine for much of the time in the west, but there were bands of showers in the east. On the 21st there was 34 mm of precipitation at Charterhall and snow fell above about 200 metres. There was 7 cm of snow lying at Glenlivet and 3 cm at Biggar. The maximum temperature was 3 °C and the next morning -7 °C was recorded at Aboyne.

Pressure recovered over the next few days as the anticyclone transferred to the mid-Atlantic and winds over Scotland backed into the north-west. The weather was mainly fair in the south with some showers in the north-west.

On the 27th a major fall of pressure took place with a deep depression over England by the end of the month. Warm air briefly covered the country on the 17th, with the temperature rising to 18 °C at Aberdeen. Polar air returned the next day as a cold front and band of rain moved south-east. For the next few days there was a mixture of clear skies, cold nights, fog and showers.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Cool but dry and quite sunny.

It was another dry month, with the majority of the month's rainfall recorded between the 4th and 9th, and on the 21st, 28th and 29th.

1st to 12th
Generally mild and dull, and with the wettest spell of the month from the 4th to 9th.

13th to 20th
Dry across all areas, but turning progressively cooler in the persistent east to north-east wind. Very sunny

across most areas from the 15th to 18th.

21st
A bitterly cold day with frequent heavy showers of hail, sleet and even of wet snow over the hills (very unusual for October). For many areas, this was the wettest day of the month.

22nd to 27th
Again much drier, but remaining cold with frequent overnight frosts.

28th & 29th
Dull and wet, although with rain most persistent and heaviest across southern and eastern areas. Rain cleared during the afternoon of the 29th with clearing skies revealing one of the most spectacular auroral displays ever across Northern Ireland.

30th & 31st
Dry, but with a chilly east to north-east wind.

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